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UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEARE'S BIBLICAL REFERENCES
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The Shakespearean plays contain 3,000 references to the Bible in 14 different translations---an absolutely staggering number. These Biblical allusions and quotations were added into the sources that the author used to create particular complex patterns of religious allegories. In Elizabethan literature and playwriting this was a common way of communicating knowledge that could not be transmitted in any other way. In the case of pastorals for instance, the surface of the text was deliberately designed to deceive, and to conceal the real meanings that had to be deciphered underneath. Since the Bible is by far the most important source for the Shakespearean plays, to understand their underlying meanings it is critical to understand the religious allegories.

Although in Elizabethan London people were taught to believe that Jesus was a historical as well as a divine figure, the alternative view, that the Gospels are literary texts, and Jesus no more than a literary character, goes back to Porphyry in the 3rd century. This was the view shared by Christopher Marlowe and by Amelia Bassano the author of the Shakespearean plays—who were the most expert literary figures of their age, and certainly knew how to distinguish a work of clever, imaginative, Menippean literature from a historical, factual account.

A detailed analysis of their plays shows that both writers assumed that the Gospels are not accounts of the life of a historical Jewish Jesus compiled by his followers sixty years after his death. Instead, they are literary creations, based partly on classical myths and Jewish literature. They were devised as war propaganda, to trick Messianic Jews into worshipping the Roman Flavian Emperors 'in disguise'. The underlying text of the plays assumes that the Gospels had been written by the Romans as literary satires of the battles in the Roman-Jewish war (66-73CE). Jesus was not a historical figure but indeed a literary character---a sort of allegorical disguise for the Emperor Titus. Anyone who succumbed and worshipped Jesus would merely be worshipping Caesar in disguise—which is a view that is now at the cutting edge of New Testament scholarship. This is what Marlowe was referring to when he wrote that the sacred Gospels were "all of one man's making" and that the figure of Jesus was merely a "deceiver" in "vain and idle stories." It is why Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* says that the swine-eating Christians were never thought upon until after Titus and Vespasian conquered Jerusalem.

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Barabas is right. The Gospels were created as Roman war propaganda, satires of the battles in which the Jews were defeated. The majority of the key events in the life of Jesus are satirical: each is an elegant literary play on a military battle in which the Jewish armies had been defeated by the Romans. The Jewish War, culminating in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, had devastated the Mediterranean economy, and the Romans were anxious to prevent another messianic outbreak. In order to make any reconstruction of the country lasting, the Romans needed to offer the Jews alternative stories that would distract them from the messianic messages inherent in the *Torah*, and persuade them to accept Roman values and to worship Caesar.

The Romans' solution to these problems was to create a special kind of post-war propaganda. They called it in Greek *evangelion*, a technical term meaning "good news of military victory." In English, it is translated as "gospel." The name is in fact ironic humor: the Romans were amusing themselves with the notion of making the Jews accept, as the actions of the Messiah Jesus, what were in fact literary echoes of the very battles in which the Romans had defeated the Jewish armies. A further joke was buried in unmistakable parallels between the life of Jesus and that of Titus: in worshiping Jesus, the Jews who adopted Christianity, as it came to be called, were in proxy hailing the Emperor of their conquerors as god, which was the Roman key strategic objective.

To replace the *Torah*, then, this view maintains that the Romans created a literary parody the Gospel of Matthew and shortly thereafter rewrote it as the versions known as Luke and Mark, modeled respectively on the *Aeneid* and on Homer. The central literary character, of the Gospels, called Jesus (or Joshua) inhabits a plot with *various peculiar features*: he begins his efforts by the Lake of Galilee; sends a legion of devils out of a demon-possessed man and into pigs; offers his flesh to be eaten; mentions signs of the destruction of Jerusalem; in Gethsemane a naked man escapes; Jesus is captured at Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives; Simon denies knowing him; he is crucified with two other men and only he survives; he is taken down from the cross by a man called Joseph of Arimathea; his disciple John survives but his disciple Simon is sent off to die in Rome; after his death, his disciple Judas dies by eviscerating himself.

Each of these peculiar events has a parallel in the writings of Josephus, our sole record of the military encounters, from 66-73CE, between the Judeans and their Roman conquerors—even to the unusual crucifixion in which three men are crucified, and a man named Joseph takes one, who survives, down. To give a flavor of the humor buried in this grand Roman joke, we see that where, in Josephus, the crucifixions (described below) take place at *Thecoe/a,* which translates as the "Village of the Inquiring Mind," the Gospels' satiric version takes place at *Golgotha,* or the "Hill of the Empty Skull."

Events at the Lake of Galilee launch the Judean careers of both Titus and Jesus. There Jesus called his disciples to be 'fishers of men'. There the Roman battle took place in which Titus attacked a band of Jewish rebels led by a leader named Jesus. The rebels fell into the water and those who were not killed by darts "attempted to swim to their enemies, the Romans cut off either their heads or

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their hands" (*Jewish War* III, 10). Men were indeed pulled out of the water like fish.

As for the episode of the Gadarene swine—in which demons leave a Gadara demoniac at Jesus' bidding and then enter into a herd of 2,000 swine, which rush wildly into the lake and drown—Josephus recounts the Roman campaign in which Vespasian marched against Gadara. In the same way that the demons were concentrated in one demoniac, Josephus describes the faults of all the rebels being concentrated in the one head of the rebel leader John. Then, rushing about "like the wildest of wild beasts," the 2000 rebels rushed over the cliff and drowned.

To take a further example, Josephus describes how Titus went out without his armor (and therefore to a soldier metaphorically naked) in the garden of Gethsemane, was nearly caught and had to flee. The parallel in the gospel of Mark is a naked young man who appears from nowhere in the Garden of Gethsemane and flees. There are a dozen such examples which appear in both sets of texts---*and in the same order*--- which it is claimed, provides statistical evidence that both works were created together as a single literary endeavor in the 80's CE----and therefore demonstrates the non historicity of the Gospel accounts. Individual parallels have been detected by half a dozen well known NT scholars but the entire set, and the implications, is summarized in Atwill's book *Caesar's Messiah.*

Just see for yourself. Compare the account of the crucifixions that happened in the Roman-Jewish war around the year 70CE, in which three men were crucified, are taken down by a Josephus bar Matthias, and one survives, with the crucifixions in the Gospels that were written as a literary parody, where three men are crucified, one is taken down by Josephus ariMatthea and survives. Then look at the death of Bottom/Pyramus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, sandwiched in between two mentions of the word PASSION and observe how the author uses parts of both texts to alert us to the literary relationship.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPHUS; Moreover, when the city Jerusalem was taken by force, I was sent for by Titus Caesar, to a certain village called Thecoa, in order to know whether it were a place fit for a camp, as I came back, I saw many captives **CRUCIFIED**, and remembered **THREE** of them as my former acquaintance. I was very sorry at this in my mind, and went with tears in my eyes to Titus, and told him of them; so he immediately commanded them to be taken down, and to have the greatest care taken of them, in order to their recovery; yet two of them died under **the PHYSICIAN'S hands**, while the third recovered.

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW; THE PASSION STORY they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull, [27:34]they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted it, he would not drink. **CASTING LOTS/DICEPLAYING** And when they had **crucified** him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots; [27:36]and they sat and watched him there. [27:37]And they set up over his head his accusation written, This Is Jesus The King Of The Jews. **THREE CRUCIFIED** [27:38]Then are there crucified with him two robbers, one on the right hand and one on the left. [27:39]And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads,

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[27:40]and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross. [27:41]In like manner also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, [27:42]He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him. [27:43]He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God. [27:44]And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach.Now from the sixth hour there was **DARKNESS** over all the land until the ninth hour. [27:46]And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? [27:47]And some of them stood there, when they heard it, said, This man calleth Elijah. [27:48]And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. [27:49]And the rest said, Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him.
GOSPEL OF JOHN soldiers therefore came, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other that was crucified with him: [19:33]but when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: **STABBING** [19:34]howbeit one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and straightway there came out blood and water… **RECOVERS**

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
Ths. This **PASSION,** and the death of a dear friend, would go near to make a man look sad.
Hippolyta Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man.
Pyramus O wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions frame? Since lion vile hath here deflower'd my dear:Which is--no, no--which was the fairest dame That lived, that loved, that liked, that look'd with cheer.Come, tears, confound; Out, sword, and wound The pap of Pyramus;
Ay, that left pap,Where heart doth hop: **STABBED IN SIDE**
Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.Now am I dead, Now am I fled;My soul is in the sky:
Tongue, lose thy light; Moon take thy flight: **GOES DARK**
Now die, die, die, die, die. *Dies*
Demetrius No die, but an ace, for him; for he is but one. **DICEPLAYING**
Lysander Less than an ace, man; for he is dead; he is nothing.
Theseus With the help of a **SURGEON** he might yet **recover,** and prove an ass.
Hippolyta How chance Moonshine is gone before Thisbe comes back and finds her lover?
Theseus She will find him by starlight. Here she comes; and
her **PASSION** ends the play.

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